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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to, and extend, the emergent Sociology of organizational space. It engages critically with labour process approaches, which position space within a control-resistance paradigm, suggesting that the conceptualization of space embedded within these accounts is limited and limiting. Drawing on insights from cultural geography the paper uses a new empirical study to show the ways that spatial meanings and spatial practices in the micro-spaces of office life are constructed through diverse experiences, memories and identities operating at a range of spatial scales.

Keywords: *Cultural Geography; Hot-desking; Labour Process; Organization; Space*

Introduction

1.1 For more than a decade Sociology has been subjected to calls for a 'spatial turn'. Distinguished writers within and beyond the discipline have claimed the inherent spatiality of social life and urged integration of the spatial into our academic imaginations (de Certeau 1988; Lefebvre 1991; Lash and Urry 1994; Soja 1996). In this context it is not surprising that Chris Baldry recently made a plea in *Sociology* for us to consider space in our analysis of work organizations, contributing his own '...exploratory foray into neglected territory' (1999; 551). In fact, Baldry's own research, and with others (1997; 1999; Bain and Baldry 1992; 1995; Baldry, Bain and Taylor 1997; 1998), has already begun to explore the interconnectedness of work buildings, interior spaces and office work and, more generally, has indicated the significance of space in previous sociological and historical studies of the workplace. In essence, this work positions organizational space within a control-resistance paradigm (Smith and Thompson 1998). Drawing on the framework of labour process theory, Baldry et al show how managers use space as a key structure of control; and how workers may resist this control at the frontier of power relations between workers and managers, labour and capital.

1.2 This paper engages critically with this emergent account of organizational space, suggesting that the framework that has dominated limits our understanding. This argument is made in three ways. First, the paper outlines the contribution made by Baldry et al in exposing the role of space as a mechanism of regulation and control but suggests that the conceptualisation of space embedded within these accounts is limited and limiting. Drawing on recent developments within cultural Geography the paper clears some theoretical ground for building an alternative account of organizational space. Second, the paper introduces a new study exploring the construction of organizational space by one group of workers, elaborating both the meanings attributed to work space and spatial practices within it. Whilst managerial uses of space provided an entry for research, the findings suggest more varied and complex constructions of organizational space reaching beyond the labour process. Finally, the paper makes three broad conclusions: suggesting that diverse and complex meanings are invested in, and enacted through, organizational space; introducing a framework for defining the empirical constituents of organizational space; and arguing that the future Sociology of organizational space must connect both structural and cultural approaches.

2: Theorising Organizational Space

2.1 It has been suggested that the Hawthorne experiments of the 1920s and 1930s are to blame for the reluctance of organizational Sociology to explicitly consider spatiality in the analysis of work organizations (Hatch 1997; Baldry, Bain and Taylor 1998). Emphasis on the social group marginalised the Hawthorne researchers' initial concern with physical environment, influencing the direction of organizational Sociology for many decades. Nonetheless, space has remained an undercurrent within subsequent accounts of organizational management and control. 'Above all, perhaps' Baldry argues, the work building 'facilitates

managerial control of the labour process, enabling the co-ordination of production through the division of labour and the construction of systems of surveillance' (Baldry 1999; 536). Buildings operate as structures of control: control over raw materials, over capital and over labour (Markus 1993). The placing of workers within these controlled spaces limits movement, communication and other forms of social interaction. For instance, architecture and interior forms can be manipulated to facilitate supervision, echoing Bentham's panopticon prison design, whereby workers sit in the central core of office/factory floor-space surrounded by management offices with windows facing inwards enabling constant visual contact with the office/shop floor.

2.2 But, as Baldry and others show, the use of space as a means of control extends beyond these strictly functional imperatives. Built form also communicates particular historical interpretations of culture and embodies the power of owners as well architects (Duffy 1980). Sprekelmeyer (1995) reads modern office architecture as a triumph of corporate instrumentalism, which effectively undermines collectivity, creativity and a sense of shared social purpose. Interiors too 'will give out signals ... subtly communicating the kind of building it is and what kind of social activity is appropriate within it' (Baldry 1997: 366). Through these architectural semiotics, the built environment provides cues on hierarchy and status and may influence behaviour as it '... sends its daily messages to the people who work within it, boosting the autonomy and status of some, while denying status to others, and stripping them of autonomy' (Baldry 1997: p.368). Within the interior, the hierarchical ordering of space, who has how much and who can move where, silently communicates widely understood messages about bureaucratic status, social status and inequality. The micro-organization of space at the level of furniture and décor as well as the ambient environment may also be read as texts of power. How smart or shabby, expensive or cheap furniture is who controls the office heating or air conditioning (Baldry, Bain and Taylor 1997) are all indicative of power relations in the workplace.

2.3 Thus far, the main thrust of the argument is that space is *done to* workers: workers are *subjected to* specific architectural and managerial constructions of organizational space. However, Baldry (1999) describes organizational space as a 'frontier of control over the working environment' (p.551), positioned by labour market and bargaining conditions, and identifies 'a mix of informal and formal, individual and collective ways in which workers challenge management control over the working environment' (Baldry 1999; 544). Precisely who finds themselves on which side of the frontier, so far as organizational space is concerned, is to some extent an empirical question. Middle managers, in particular, may have limited control over the spaces that they occupy, with many decisions about workspace already taken by architects, property developers or Corporate HQ, for instance. This may place particular managers in ambivalent relationships to organizational space, not only controlling but also resisting imposed constructions of space.

2.4 Discussing collective practices of resistance, Baldry, Bain and Taylor (1997) cite recent instances of white-collar industrial action that have taken place in the UK in response to the poor quality of the office environment, particularly over office temperatures. There are also less formal processes of resistance to managerial strategies of spatial control. For example, Baldry refers to 'frequent accounts of the deliberate breaking of rules ... about how space is to be used and workers using space for purposes other than those intended' (1999; 544). Instances of this include the 'borrowing' of organizational spaces for personal interactions, gossip or going outside to smoke. So far as individual resistance is concerned, Baldry suggests that the most common practice is the personalisation of work spaces. Here, Baldry suggests, workers are expressing a sense of individuality to demonstrate resistance to imposed constructions of organizational space.

2.5 Of course, as Baldry makes clear, buildings and interiors alone are not solely responsible for organizational control. And there may be disjunctions between architectural semiotics and other elements of the employment relation. For instance, as Baldry (1999) suggests - potted plants and fitted carpets will not disguise the stressful nature of work in intensified and tightly monitored offices, such as call centres. Nonetheless, organizational space offers powerful material and discursive 'structures of and for control' (Baldry 1999; 535). This leads Baldry (1999) to call for organizational Sociologists to re-integrate the working environment - conceptualised as 'socially constructed space' (p.536) - into their analysis 'as part of both the objective conditions of the labour process and the subjective conditions of control and subordination' (ibid).

2.6 However, despite an emphasis on the socially constructed nature of organizational space, the labour process framework limits investigation of this. In general, this stems from a focus on the strategic *use* of organizational space by key managers, rather than a broader investigation of the *meanings* of organizational space or how these are linked to *practice*. Arising from this are two specific issues. The first concerns the conceptualisation of organizational space, and the second the place of workers' accounts of space within this.

2.7 In relation to the first point, the labour process framework leads to the conceptualisation of

organizational space as *conceived* by responsible managers (albeit not necessarily under conditions of their own making) and *responded* to by workers. By contrast, recent interventions by cultural and social geographers emphasise the multiple, competing and dynamic constructions of space and place. Whilst owners and managers constructions of organizational space may remain powerful within this interpretation, there can be no fixed meaning given to any particular place or space, past or present: rather places and spaces will carry *many* and *conflicting* personal and cultural meanings constructed both within and beyond particular locales. Henri Lefebvre (1991) for example, speaks of the 'hypercomplexity' of social space (p.88) and argues that '...each fragment of space subjected to analysis masks not just one social relationship but a host of them that analysis can potentially disclose' (ibid). Within this theoretical approach particular spaces and places are understood to be dynamic, constructed at the point of intersection between 'social inter-relations and interactions at all social scales from the most local to the most global' (Massey 1993; 155; also Massey 1994). Potentially this formulation includes global markets and embodied identities, local histories and mass culture, international management orthodoxies and individual life stories: inter-acting to produce on-going narratives of the meanings of particular spaces. Recent writing on architecture by geographers drawing on these theoretical developments illustrates the point nicely. Loretta Lees (2001) for instance describes architecture as 'a material connection between people and places or between contexts where racial, gender, sexed and other, bodily identities intersect to produce lived and practical experiences of the built environment' (Imrie 2003; 51). These theoretical propositions suggest a rather different approach to organizational space, elaborating diverse meanings and practices rather than strategic use of space by one set of interests. For whilst these geographers are often centrally concerned with capitalist imperatives and the uses that made are of space in securing profit, the production of space cannot be reduced to this. Rather, this perspective emphasises the multiple and competing productions of space made through the interactions of space as *conceived* by architects, planners and managers and space *perceived* and *lived* through its 'imagery and symbolic elements' (Lefebvre 1991; 41) located in social history 'as well as in the history of each individual' (ibid). These debates about space and identity, meanings and practices have rarely touched the study of *work* places and spaces. (See McDowell 1997 for some provocative speculation).

2.8 The second limitation of accounts to date concerns the under-representation of the *meanings* that *workers* attribute to organizational space, and how these influence spatial practice. Much existing research is analytical and theoretical, yet to be explored empirically whilst the 'workers' stories' that do appear are constrained by the labour process framework that informs the approach. Conceptualising space as a strategy of managerial control leads to questions about workers' subjection to specific elements of that managerial control and keeps analysis of organizational space within a limited framework. In one instance, the effect of this is to reduce "the workers' story" (Baldry, Bain and Taylor 1998; 178) to seven dimensions of environmental quality, including air quality and noise control, thermal and lighting comfort and privacy. These are certainly important factors in office workers' experience at work. However, the research reported here aims to extend the conceptualisation of organizational space and to explore the uses and meanings of organizational space including, but not confined to, the question of managerial control: to examine the 'reading of spaces by actors' (Fox 1997; 649) and the 'routine art of practice' (de Certeau 1988; 24) within organizational space.

3: Researching Spatial Meanings

3.1 Researching spatial meanings is not easy. Meanings are hard to elicit: hard for individuals to untangle from the habitual routines of everyday life (Knowles 2000) and difficult to articulate. A key research opportunity arises when established spatial configurations are challenged. Change offers a window onto the 'taken for granted', revealing assumptions and conventions as they are challenged by alternatives. The study discussed here is based on such an opportunity. Here, a multi-national UK based insurance company conducted an experiment with the office space in a small, IT office in one of its UK satellites in the North of England. The office was located within a complex of carpet mills, redeveloped by a local entrepreneur to incorporate an art gallery and commercial services as well as office space, some of which was rented by the insurance company.



Photograph 1. The Mills



Photograph 2. The Mills

3.2 The IT office employed 48 permanent staff on full and part-time contracts working in a range of mainframe, pc and associated activities. There was also a small number of temporary staff, but these were not available for inclusion in this research. The office was open plan, arranged along the long and narrow

space of an original weaving room. The structural steel supports were the only visible interior reminder of the building's history; the original arches concealed beneath a layer of polystyrene ceiling tiles and bland corporate décor.



Photograph 3. The Office

3.3 The 'Workplace Transformation' project was conceived and funded from the South and implemented by local managers between 2001 and 2003. The project had three strands. First, all staff were set up with equipment for home-working. Second, an office re-design removed eight workstations and installed 'comfy' areas in their place. Third, a policy of hot-desking was introduced. All staff were required to clear their desks of any personal items and to keep these, along with their work materials (manuals, stationery), in individual lockers installed in the office. It was made clear that staff no longer had a personal desk and they were encouraged to circulate throughout the office in their seating practice. The management rationale for the project was that it would serve as a pilot for the company, which was keen to cut costs on office rentals in London and the South East.

3.4 A longitudinal research design was used. First contact was made with the company in November 2001, and six day visits were made, to establish access and to observe developments over the lifetime of the Workplace Transformation project. The empirical research was conducted in three phases and comprised interviews with key informants, non-participant observation, questionnaire surveys, focus groups and in-depth interviews. This paper draws primarily on observations, questionnaire material and in-depth interviews. (See Table 1). Photographs have been used to illustrate the paper.

Table 1: Research Methods

	Observations	Questionnaire	In -depth Interviews
December 2001	Throughout the project, observations	Sent to all staff. Response rate 88%.	
September 2002	were conducted in the office, recording details	Sent to all	10 interviews - selected to include

	of layout, décor, personalisation of space as well as	staff. Response rate 63%.	women and men and different ages, positions, teams, and length of service.
January 2003	individual and group spatial practices	Sent to all staff. Response rate 69%.	14 interviews (9 of those above + 5 others)

3.5 The questionnaires were analysed using SPSS. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, then analysed through intensive readings and re-readings of transcripts enabling the identification of key themes. Throughout this paper, all names and specific identifying details have been changed or excluded to ensure the confidentiality of individuals taking part in the research. There is one exception to this, an individual who could potentially be identified if details included here were combined with local knowledge. A full explanation of the potential for identification was discussed specifically with this individual who gave consent for publication. Internal photographs were taken by staff members, with the knowledge and tacit permission of individuals captured within them. Since not all present in the photographs could be contacted for specific consent to publish in this instance, individual faces have been obscured.

3.6 This paper focuses on meanings and uses of office space in this context. Not only did Workplace Transformation challenge particular meanings and practices, around desk ownership for instance, the climate of change also enabled exploration of other meanings and uses of office and building spaces. The following section uses quantitative material from the questionnaires to describe staff views and practices during the implementation phase of Workplace Transformation. This analysis is developed in Section 5 where material from the in-depth interviews is discussed in detail.

Workplace Transformation: attitudes and practices

4.1 The implementation of the Workplace Transformation programme took 12 months. By 2003 over 90% of office staff were working at home at least once a week. Whilst the most frequently cited advantage to working at home was 'peace and quiet' (56%) as many as 82% of respondents felt that office sociability had suffered as a consequence. Although the majority of respondents claimed ambivalence to hot-desking, the issue provoked strong feelings in the office producing some ardent supporters and vehement opponents.

Table 2: What is your view of hot-desking?

	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2	Questionnaire 3
	%	%	%
Very strongly against	16.7	13.3	9.1
Against	26.1	20.0	12.1
Neither for or against	31.0	46.7	45.5
In favour	16.7	10.0	27.3
Very strongly in favour	9.5	10.0	6.1
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%

4.2 Statistical analysis of the questionnaires reveals no strong relationships between attitudes to hot-desking and sex, age or grade. The first questionnaire, for instance, showed equal numbers of women and men opposing and supporting the initiative; an equal spread of views across the age bands; and approximately half of both team managers and their staff to oppose hot-desking. However, statistical analysis does suggest that length of service is positively correlated with opposition to the hot-desking policy. Average length of service was 12 years and 2 months. Of the 14 respondents who had served ten years or less with the company (Questionnaire 3), *not one* was opposed to hot-desking. Most were ambivalent, but 36% were in favour of the policy. Of the 19 staff who had served more than 10 years, as many as 37% were against the policy, whilst 31% were favour. The negative aspects of hot-desking were

seen as follows:

Table 3: Negative features of hot-desking

	Questionnaire 1	Questionnaire 2
No personal space	73.8	55.1
Competition for space	59.5	48.2
Loss of team identity	57.1	75.8
Loss of routine	31.0	27.5

4.3 In the event, the practice of hot-desking has been very limited. The removal of just 8 workspaces, combined with widespread home-working has resulted in little pressure on desk space and staff usually secure their 'own' desk or one nearby. Although the importance of a personal desk has declined over time, a constant quarter of respondents *expected* to still have their 'own desk' after the imposition of hot desking and more than a third still did not clear their desks at the end of the day. Even when the policy had been in place for nearly 5 months, 35% admitted to actively trying to sit with the same people every day.

4.4 What underlies these views? What meanings construct these attitudes? Is loss of personal space perceived as a pushing back of the frontier of control in staff-management relations? Why do some people not mind about this? How is resistance explained? The following section uses analysis of the in-depth interviews to explore the subjective meanings of organizational space that are offered in explanation of these diverse attitudes and practices.

5: Spatial Representation and Practices

5.1 Analysis of focus groups and interview transcripts produced three main representations of organizational space. Individual relations to these representations informed and explained accounts of spatial practice, highlighting the inextricability of perceived and lived space. Each of the three main representations of space was *recognised* by all respondents, but provoked diverse responses, between and within individuals: from endorsement and acceptance to subversion, resistance and denial. Although the imposed managerial construction of space appears in all three representations of organizational space analysed below, it is intertwined with other social relationships within and beyond managerial and organizational frameworks. The accounts presented are at times framed by notions of managerial control and at other times by something else altogether, by alternative frameworks rooted in diverse and complex personal resources that produce meaning from outside organizational and managerial discourses.

Space as Entitlement and the Spatial Scaling of Lives

5.2 The hypercomplexity of organizational space is well illustrated if we begin with the discourse of space as entitlement: *I think working for a company you do them a favour, I mean they pay you but you do them a favour. And ... you should have your own desk... you should be able to come into work and know where you're sat on a daily basis and have the little things, you should be able to, because we always had a case where you could personalise your desk. So people have pictures up of their children and little drawings that the children have done and photographs, whatever, or plants, whatever, and some of your own books, magazines or whatever. So that becomes your space. So you come to work and you have your space ... this is your own to work in.* (Owen, 15 years service)



Photograph 4. Personalised Office Space

5.3 For Owen, removing the right to personal space was experienced as depersonalising and devaluing: *... you do feel a bit less valued perhaps and more of like I'm a number rather than a name or whatever and I think with the sort of taking the desk away is de-personalising your work space* (Owen)

5.4 Others complained: *'we like to sit a comfortable desk surrounded by what you know ... They're forcing something on us'* (Colin, 12 years service). In the event, there was effective resistance to hot-desking. Most flagrantly, a group of five individuals came to an arrangement whereby one person would start work early and log the others onto adjacent workstations. This required knowledge of personal IDs and passwords, the latter a disciplinary offence.

5.5 Thus far, these accounts offer a discourse of organizational space that appears to be constructed within a framework of staff-management relations. However, whilst others *recognised* the 'entitlement' discourse amongst some of their colleagues, they were also dismissive. When the group logging on practice became common knowledge, there was horror and amusement, but also a ready explanation for the practice, drawing on the spatial scaling of individual histories rather than organizationally imposed constructions of space. Life histories were recounted at distinctive spatial scales, from the very local to the global. The living of lives at particular spatial scales was tied, in this case, to views of Workplace Transformation and to spatial practice in the office. The practices of those in strongest opposition to hot desking were linked to organizational and local embeddedness. There was a strong link between length of service and opposition to hot desking. Indeed, many of the opponents had been in their jobs since leaving school.. As Megan explained: *I mean a lot of us have worked here since we were 16 and we've all grown up together... a lot of us have worked here for like fifteen years, it's like a family and everybody is really such good friends* (Megan)

5.6 Here the meaning and use of office space is tied to friendship in place, and challenges to the organization of space are understood within this framework. As Christine noted on moving to Insurance Co... *the thing that hit me when I came here ... was that this is people's whole life! ... Certainly, they were very resistant initially to hot-desking ... I mean there were people who not only didn't want to work at home themselves they didn't want anybody working at home, you know they just wanted to come in and have their chums* (Christine)

5.7 Whilst these individuals saw the re-organization of space as managerially imposed, they were not resistant to the managerial rationale for change (as a way, ultimately, of cutting office rental costs), and their objections were framed by localised sociabilities rather than working practices. Certainly, the managers were attempting to control their space, but these employees' objections are not solely

accountable within a labour process framework. In significant part, these individuals were coming to work to enact their social lives and it was the impact of hot-desking on this, rather than specific tasks, workloads or modes of production that they objected to. For those who have grown up in the town and always held the same job, close personal relationships have developed at work, an active social life flourishes and there are several instances of co-habitation and/or marriage. For these people, work is centrally about friendships and social identities constructed in formative years and maintained through spatial practices at work. As an aside, this suggests something rather different to the limited discussion of the workplace within the sociological accounts of friendship, where there is a tendency to translate friendship at work into 'informal solidarity' (Allan 1996) implicitly distinct from 'proper' friendship. To the contrary, these findings endorse Marks' (1994) claims that we extensively and routinely find friendship at work.

5.8 Alternative accounts of hot-desking and associated spatial practices were linked to other spatial scales, from the national to the global. Amongst those who have moved into the company from elsewhere, and commonly also live elsewhere, the long-standing and inward looking sociability in the office stasis disables critical perspective resulting in an inability to take a positive view of hot-desking, or organizational change more generally. These alternative accounts of organizational space are framed by diverse personal histories, including labour market experiences but also wider articulations of identity. In marking himself in opposition to those above, Ali explains *It is a social thing for them coming to work and they meet each other outside of work as well, they don't know anybody else, if they do it's through somebody else who's friendly [at work].... John, I laugh at him every morning, he comes in, logs on five terminals so he can have his mates around him... they think their social life and their life would be turned upside down if they left this place* (Ali)

5.9 Ali, and others, represent themselves as travellers, both in their working and personal lives. Whilst they have worked for Insurance Co, in Milltown, for between 3 and 10 years, these travellers represent themselves as less rooted. They are sociable but not dependent, emphasising other options: *I have some people in my team I get on extremely well with, and I might have quite open, personal conversations with them, but they're not my social life, you know? That happens at home and I have other friends and family that are [my social life]* (Christine)

5.10 This is underscored by commuting distances which make evenings out in Milltown less practical. Hot-desking presents no problem to these travellers, *I don't mind who I sit next to at all, and I quite deliberately move about* (Christine) *No I can work anywhere. I've worked in Liverpool office, I fitted in straight away, I didn't even have a desk there. In fact I used to come in the Liverpool office, log on somewhere until somebody comes in and kicks me out basically because I didn't know if they were on holiday or not. (Ali) So that's the sort of job you can sit wherever you like, it doesn't matter where you sit so yeah I'll hassle some people.* (Dev)

5.11 They are critical of what they see as a small town, siege mentality: a refusal to embrace change or even opportunities in other locations: *I think people are very nervous about working across sites with other people they don't know but then I think there are quite a lot of people who've never worked anywhere else. ... I tend to regard working with people at a different site ... it might be nerve-wracking ... but generally I regard it as, oh, exciting news you know I'm fed-up with boring projects with the same old people you know? (Christine) ... they haven't chosen to embrace the bigger picture. [it's like] " In Milltown we like to do things the way we like to do them and if we have to get involved we'll do it but we'll begrudgingly do it. We won't say 'Oh yeah let's go for it, we'll take ownership'" (Dev)*

5.12 Dev represents his lack of attachment to space as progressive and casts rooted-ness as parochial. For him, criticisms of hot-desking are part of a package of reactionary attitudes amongst people who have too much invested in the organization. They are rooted in the local, isolated and refuse to connect beyond the local, even where there is this opportunity. For Dev, re-organization of office space has the potential to promote a new office culture, one that he would identify more closely with.

5.13 These travellers' stories could be read as evidence of the emergence of an entrepreneurial (du Gay 1995) or corroded (Sennett 1999) self, as identities are manipulated by long-term changes to the organization of capitalism. However, these representations of self come from elsewhere too: from other spatial stories linked to childhood, marriage, child-care and the housing market, for instance, associated with individual articulations of identity. Complex spatial histories frame distinctive meanings and practices within organizational space that cannot be adequately explained within the terms of acquiescence or resistance to managerially imposed constructions of organizational space, or even more general, nebulous shifts in the nature of production. This is well illustrated by Ali's account. Ali was perhaps the most vociferous exponent of mobility and supporter of hot-desking. He explains his lack of attachment to space in the following terms *It's my background ... I was deported from my country you see. A long time ago. As you've probably gathered I'm not English, I'm a British citizen now, but in 1980 we got deported by Sadaam Hussein from our own country and since then I haven't had a home really as such so possession and all*

that doesn't mean anything to me ... They took everything ... you know I was in my pyjamas, you know - nothing, no possessions, they took any rings or gold or anything they took off you, they totally stripped you of any materialistic stuff and then took it. ... I'm so easy, I don't know it's like I can't believe in something so strongly because it will only feel like someone will take it away. So when somebody says to me that you don't need a desk any more I don't feel it a big problem, I've lost a country let alone, you know, a little desk.



Photograph 5. The hot-desking environment

5.14 Despite these insecurities, Ali is now married and a father, but his feelings of national rootless-ness still shape his feelings towards more localised spatial territories. This is certainly a dramatic and unusual explanation for constructions of organizational space. But it shows that spatial meaning and spatial practice are constructed from diverse and complex personal resources, operating at different spatial scales, which may lie outside managerial discourse. Hot-desking is not (only) contested because of status or managerial-worker conflicts but because of friendship. Hot-desking is not (only) supported as a career move or through acquiescence, but through more complex histories of mobility and flexibility constructed in and outside the labour market.

Space As Social Landscape

5.15 Organizational space was also represented as a social landscape, and spatial practice explained on this terrain. Here, social relations are intrinsically spatial, whether manifested in a desire to sit with friends, with team colleagues or with/away from managers. Social relations are mediated through spatial configurations; and social relations are made more manageable if they take place in fixed, predictable spatial configurations.

5.16 The Workplace Transformation programme challenged the established spatial configuration of social relations in the office. Home-working meant people were absent from the office regularly, whilst hot-desking meant they had no fixed desk to return to. For some, this was highly stressful, making new demands for workplace performance and entailing new forms of tactical planning in office life. Michael describes this: *I mean one of the traumas of course is coming in the office and not knowing where you're going to end up sitting, that's a down side to it.... it's not just the physical space it's the people you work with as well. You know you get to know the people who sit immediately around you ... and as I said I'm not a particularly sociable person so that is probably going to hit me harder than most people ... I mean I know some people might say "Well they might get to know other people a bit better," but I don't particularly look forward to that, personally I'm not that social.*

5.17 Throughout both his interviews, Michael repeatedly positioned himself in this way. Whilst he claimed to be quite happy with the management rationale for hot-desking, the social demands that this placed on him were experienced as deeply incompatible with his own sense of self. Tom was also highly attuned to the social implications of hot-desking: *I suppose personally when I come back in you're kind of wondering is it still the same?... do other people accept me as part of the office when I come back in? ... When you come into the office and people are all in completely different places you've got to kind of adjust mentally to being in a new situation and think right how do I react to this social environment? ... I'm going to go and sit there, right what are the implications of that? You know, who's sitting near me? What does that mean?*

5.18 Tom attempted to manage these insecurities with 'several weeks' of thought given to his spatial tactics. These tactics are especially important in this office because of the strong spatializations of the two main teams. The mainframe and PC team are represented as different species, each requiring its own territory: *I can't quite understand why, I've never got to the bottom of this but they are vastly different personalities in the two. They're similar within the team, the personalities are similar but they're vastly different to each other so it's not surprising they don't mix really* (Graham)

5.19 To have to sit in the others' space is like a trip to a foreign land, a trip that some are not willing to make: *It's a bit us and them, mainframe and PC ... somebody came in, they'd been on call the night before so they came in late, about 11 o'clock and there were no desks left ... in mainframe, there were only one up in PC and they wouldn't go and sit amongst the others and they went home. Which I thought were a bit of a weird thing to do because I mean we've known most of them for like ten years and they're not that weird down there so it was a bit over the top I think to actually go home rather than sit at a desk at the other end of the office.* (Megan)

5.20 While this incident was widely regarded as extreme, many others described their reluctance to cross the border. The 'other' team space represented a different collective identity, articulated by both sides as noisy vs. quiet, boisterous vs. studious and in other more derogatory and contested terms. The spatiality of teams was widely translated into a hierarchy of spatial choice, beginning with one's 'own' desk, then team space, then the spaces usually occupied by the two small 'intermediate' teams and last, and least, the opposite camp.

5.21 In addition to the team-maps of the office, there was also anxiety over hierarchy in the politics of seating. The local managers in the office were concerned not to be seen as imposing extra surveillance through their seating choices, whilst staff were uncertain whether to be 'friendly' and sit near the managers or to avoid them out of respect or fear that they might be seen as a 'creep'. Arguably, similar issues arose over gendered and sexualised relations, particularly how to negotiate a mode of operation with new people. What are the appropriate terms and rules of engagement? One group in the office began the working day with discussion of the previous night's activities, involving a lot of innuendo and explicitly sexualised conversation. This was routine for them but would have been literally out of place in other spaces within the office. Further, because no-one was hot-desking (in the sense of using the whole space randomly) anyone who did choose to do so would effectively be doing something noteworthy, and subject to intense speculation, as Dev explains ... *if I went and sat next to, I don't know, Janice's desk in the Mainframe team, it would be like 'woah' they'd be like [uncomprehending] ... if I went and sat [there] they would absolutely not say owt ... they'd just think 'what's he doing here?'*

5.22 From observations, I would agree that the others would say nothing to his face but have no doubt that they would discuss this matter between themselves at the first opportunity for privacy.

5.23 Spatial practices in this office have remained routinized, even where there is free choice over where to locate, certainly a removal of managerial control of seating arrangements. Here this is bound with the spatializations of office relationships into readily readable and manageable forms

Space Symbolising Place

5.24 The third discourse concerned the symbolic value of organizational space as it carried representations of different places, at varying scales: of the IT division, of the site, the town and even the North. In part, this concerned the status of the IT division, in the context of a multi-site corporation, but organizational space also carried feelings of local and regional pride, linked to industrial heritage and regional identities operating outside organizational relations.

5.25 Initially Workplace Transformation had entailed a radical re-design of the office space. This was interpreted by some as symbolic of a dynamic and 'go-ahead' organization, representing an endorsement of the IT office and its organizational status. Graham describes how he was *Quite excited by it, I thought it was quite dynamic, quite daring really ... The scale of it, the attitude that was there behind it and the willingness to try something. ... talking to my friends outside of the company when I explain to them what was going on you know there was this "wow that's happening in Milltown" kind of attitude and that's where I think we got quite a dynamic view of the company and a very positive view of the company.* (Graham)

5.26 In the event, the original plans were not implemented and delight turned to cynicism as staff realised the limited scale of change. There was a sense that 'we've always felt poorly provided for' in comparison with other sites, which were seen as 'more plush'. *[Here] it's all done on the cheap, as cheap as possible, and the carpet doesn't, you know, doesn't get replaced very often and it's all a bit worn and the decorating*

hasn't been done for ages so from that point of view its not the most pleasant place to work. (Michael)

5.27 This sense of organizational marginalisation was also derived from the spatial metaphors used by the company itself to describe its multiple sites: *We just think that we're poor cousins, I suppose you could say - the outlying locations. And they even started calling us satellite locations. You know 'let's just cut that cord and let it fly off', you know? Not that its part of the group, it's a satellite site'* (Dev)

5.28 Indeed, one of the local managers spoke explicitly of the introduction of the term 'satellite' as a rationale for subsequent restructuring that impacted particularly badly on the Milltown site.

5.29 However, beyond these concerns with organizational status, the building form itself also carried a great deal of symbolism for staff in the office, linking to wider notions of industrial heritage and regional identity. For Graham, born and brought up in Milltown, the building dominated his childhood memories. He took pleasure in its resurrection, offering continuity between past and present and it was a source of pride that a local entrepreneur had achieved this imaginative transformation *The building I think is a fabulous building but I've grown up in this town so it's always been here. So to see it being used completely opposite to what it was probably designed for in the first place I think is something that you know somebody had the vision how to do it and when I show people round the building, friends for example and I've said 'that's where we work, they've gone 'wow, I'm well impressed' ... I am proud of the town also and ..., it's a good symbol of the town and it's widely recognised actually outside the town*

5.30 Outsiders too made links to wider notions of regional pride, industrial heritage and aesthetic: *From my own upbringing in the West country [SW England], this whole area is totally different, and I think that's always held me in some respects, because its so different and, if you like, the industrial heritage that its come from ... it's something to be proud of ... This is our environment you know it's almost we're up North industrial but it's ours ... It represents us and we're proud of it.* (Alasdair)

5.31 Christine was so impressed with the building when she first arrived that she took photographs (of her workplace, remember) to keep at home. She explains this attraction as follows *I mean my second job was in manufacturing and I always felt I really liked that ... the idea of people actually making things rather than, you know, finances you're not actually producing anything you're just sort of pushing paper around and you're not in one sense contributing to the world in the slightest ... I think the idea of manufacturing ... I just like the way it seems to be well thought out. If you walk around there's sort of quite a lot of alley ways and the stair case goes right up onto the main road ... I don't know it's sort of like Elizabeth Gaskell and all the sort of Victorian work, even though I know that actually Victorian workplaces were appalling and they were sweat shops it's kind the idea of industry and people being productive that I find, there's something rather sort of smooth and soulless I find about business parks, the fact that a place has a history and big chimneys and, I don't know*

5.32 One older member of staff whose personal history was tied up more intimately with the industrial heritage of the region expressed more ambivalence still: *I think I more than probably most can remember what the mills were like before. I used to go to work with my Dad. My Dad was an electrician and he used to work in mills and they were dirty and smelly and although they weren't carpet mills which is what this was but I think I'm working in a mill (distaste)* (Ian)

5.33 There was far less enthusiasm - with a couple of exceptions - for the gallery space occupying the main entrance space on the ground floor of the mill.



Photograph 7. The Gallery (Office via stairs in the far corner)

5.34 Whilst this offered a contrast to the 'drab' office space, few ever visited it. This was explained in terms of practicalities. Time was more important than space, and as the nearest car park was around the back of the building, most staff used the inauspicious back entrance instead.



Photograph 8. The Back Entrance

5.35 The meanings and uses of these organizational spaces were also linked to a range of individual resources. For instance, of the two individuals who used the gallery space most regularly, one explained this in terms of his personal identity as 'a visual person', keen to discuss the exhibitions and specific exhibits; whilst the other explained that he had taken to parking his car further away since he had joined Weight Watchers and the Gallery entrance was now the best route for him!

5.36 The symbolic meanings attached to organizational space here are linked, in part, to senior managerial control of status and reward in the shape of refurbishment. These decisions are made in the South with managers on the site apparently having little control over them. Beyond this though, staff also drew explicitly on local and regional identities to represent the meaning of the Mill that they worked in. There was pride in the town and the industrial heritage embedded in the building form, sometimes in clear opposition to the South, as well as instances where personal memories shaped distinctive relations with the built environment of the office.

6: Discussion

6.1 The empirical discussion above has focussed on the subjective interpretations of organizational space made by a specific group of workers, and their associated spatial practices. This reveals that whilst workers' constructions of organizational space encompass issues of control and resistance, the uses and meanings of organizational space draw on other dynamics and relations too: linking the micro-spaces of office life to other experiences, memories and identities incorporating other spatial scales. Spatial meanings and spatial practices at work are constructed from a diverse range of embodied resources. They are intimately connected with identity: in constructing meaning and practice, space and spatiality become a 'vehicle of meaning' (Klotz 1992; 235) invested with specific and multiple identities. For Ali, Dev and Christine, mobility - in the office, in their working lives and geographically too - is central to their representations of self. Conversely, for Megan and the gang of five, stasis and the integration of their social and work lives over space have been central to the transition from youth to adult identities. Spatial meaning and practice are used to articulate identities as Michael, for instance, explains in linking his (uncertain) sociability to spatial fixity, whilst, for some, identities are constructed through spatial meaning and practice. For Ali, the Iraqi refugee, rootless-ness, transience and a lack of attachment to material space define the way that he chooses to represent himself, in this context at least. This latter point, and the connection with identity more generally, insists that whilst constructions of space and spatial practice may become embedded in familiarity and routine there is nothing inevitable about this. Meanings and uses of organizational space may be subject to change over even brief time scales, let alone longer periods.

6.2 These findings about the multiple meanings of organizational space lead to two further observations, both of relevance for future research into the Sociology of organizational space. The first concerns the empirical constituents of organizational space. The findings here suggest the importance of multiple, interlocking spatial scales. The spatial division of the organization at a regional, national and even global scale was important to the Milltown workers, embodying and sustaining organizational hierarchy, representing both opportunity and marginalisation. The specific site of the organization, linked to local and regional histories, shaped interpretations of organizational space and workplace relations. In this case, the building offered specific representation of local history and Northern pride, mixed with class-consciousness but, of course, specific buildings in other sites may be significant in representing and/or constructing other meanings. The office (or immediate working environment) was the main focus of concern for most of the staff in this case, but is clearly sub-divided into more local office spaces both at team level and in terms of individual workspace. Finally, although this has not been explicitly considered here, we might include body space, referring to the spaces occupied by the body, the manner of bodily occupation and to the embodied experience of organizational space for instance through sensual encounters of sound, vision and touch engaging the material as well as the social body. This list is intended to operate as a methodological device rather than a framework for theoretical interpretation. In the construction of spatial meanings and practices these social spaces interpenetrate one another (Lefebvre 1991; 86). Whilst desk spaces, buildings or head offices are physically distinct, the meanings invested in and enacted through these spaces operate with more fluid boundaries. For whilst 'visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general give rise ... to an appearance of separation between spaces ... in fact what exists is ambiguous continuity' (Lefebvre 1991; p.87).

6.2 All this is a long way from where we started, where organizational space was seen as a resource in the hands of key managers, used as a mechanism of control and (perhaps) resisted by workers through their own spatial practice. The theoretical approach and empirical research reported here show that meanings of organizational space, and spatial practices at work, are not encapsulated within the framework offered by labour process theory. But this is not to deny the importance of space as a means of managerial control, or workers resistance to this control. Whilst hot-desking and home-working are relatively new organizational practices, I am not suggesting that they constitute a new organizational or managerial paradigm that

outdates labour process theory (Smith and Thompson 1998). Certainly dynamics of managerial control and worker resistance were present in the Milltown study. But they were not the only elements present. Meanings and associated practices of assent and resistance included and stretched beyond this. On a broader canvas, this may appear to return us to familiar tensions between structural and cultural conceptualisations of work organizations. However, along with others, I would suggest that we cannot resolve this by arguing ever more loudly for one approach or the other (Clegg 1990; Taylor 1998; Granovetter and Swedberg 1992). To recognise the multiplicity of organizational space is not to deny the use of space within the labour process. But this framework does not capture the complexity of organizational space. Other processes, relations and identities exist beyond this and the exercise of and resistance to managerial control is not separate from these, but is embedded within them.

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